

Harris County Archives
Houston, Texas

Oral History Collection

#07

An Interview with Sarah McLemore

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Interviewer: Luis DeLeón

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Oral History Transcription
Sarah McLemore
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Tape 1 Side A

LUIS DE LEON: This is Luis De Leon interviewing Sarah McLemore for the Harris County Archives Oral History Program. The interview is taking place on August 9, 2010, in Houston, Texas. I am interviewing Mrs. McLemore in order to obtain her recollections concerning the Harris County Tax Office.

Mrs. McLemore, what are your parents' names?

SARAH MCLEMORE: My mother's name is Mary Woodul Vest. My father's name is Edmond Wiley Vest.

LUIS DE LEON: And where were you born?

SARAH MCLEMORE: I was born in Alice, Texas.

LUIS DE LEON: When?

SARAH MCLEMORE: May 22, 1948.

LUIS DE LEON: Describe your family to me.

SARAH MCLEMORE: Well I have of course my mother and my father. Then I have a sister that's five years older and a brother that's five years younger.

LUIS DE LEON: So you're right in the middle, then?

SARAH MCLEMORE: Yes. Middle child.

LUIS DE LEON: Did you grow up in Alice, Texas?

SARAH MCLEMORE: Yes, I lived in Alice until 1965 when I married and then moved from Alice to Pasadena, Texas.

DE LEON: Tell me about your early education.

MCLEMORE: I attended elementary school, junior high school, and high school. I got married young, so I left school six weeks short of finishing my junior year in high school. And then after I moved to Pasadena, I went to San Jac College [San Jacinto College] and got my GED.

DE LEON: Where did you go to elementary school?

SARAH MCLEMORE: At Schallert Elementary School in Alice, Texas. And then junior high school was at Dubose Junior High School, and the high school's name was William Adams High School in Alice.

DE LEON: When did you begin working at the Tax Office?

MCLEMORE: I started working at the Tax Office I believe it was July 17, 1979. And I started working at the Pasadena office actually as a county temp working I believe like 10:30 to 3:30 at the Pasadena Annex or branch.

DE LEON: Was that your first job?

MCLEMORE: No, I had worked for about a year prior to that at Mira-Pak, which was a company that made the formers for snack bagging. They made the actual equipment that formed the boxes and the bags for like Lay's Potato Chips and so forth. They were over off of OST [Old Spanish Trail] at that time and I was in their accounts payable department.

DE LEON: And when did you work there?

MCLEMORE: Probably from about August 1978 until I took the job at the County in July 1979. Prior to that I didn't work formally for a company but I did do a little bit of work -- maybe for about six months to a year -- for a company called Jack

Cotten Ignitions. I did secretarial work and some assembly work assembling ignition wire harnesses and so forth and packaging work for shipping.

Other than that I did a lot of volunteer work at my children's school at Alex Smith Elementary in South Houston, Pasadena School District and was a room mother representative for the children's school parties and so forth. I also was parliamentarian for the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] and then later was the president of PTA for the local school. I was also on their district PTA board and was cultural arts director. That was directing a program for the Pasadena Independent School District children and the PTA to develop their cultural abilities such as writing and music. There was a contest that they had every year so I did a lot of that as well as volunteering in the church and so forth. So, I worked before I earned money to work.

DE LEON: Was this all only in the elementary school?

MCLEMORE: Yes. Because it seemed like once they got past elementary school the PTA wasn't as active and that was about the time I went to work was when my children got out of elementary school. So I really only actively worked with the PTA about another year. But, one year when I was president of PTA, I did go to Austin one summer and went to a lot of the meetings that they were having with the Senate and went to committees on education. So it was quite a learning experience and interesting.

DE LEON: When you say "meetings with the Senate," you're talking about . . .

MCLEMORE: It wasn't like a Senate in session, but they had some little individual sessions, I

guess it was more or less scheduled for this type of program that we were having

at the University of Texas. We did go to the Capital and then we had like just some little session things geared towards education and funding for the schools.

DE LEON: So you mentioned you had your first job at the Tax Office in 1979. How did you find out about the job?

SARAH MCLEMORE: Actually, the man that was my boss at Mira-Pak, his wife was a window teller, window clerk as we use the term at that time, at the Pasadena office and she had told him that they were needing a part time person. I was interested in that so that I could be at home more when the children left to go to school and then when it was time for them to be home from school. So I did that for almost two years. I believe it was from July 1979 until May 1981 and in May 1981 is when I became a full-time permanent employee for Harris County Tax office.

DE LEON: Could you describe the job as a window clerk to me?

MCLEMORE: As a window teller, or a window clerk as we called it then, your main function was to register your customers' motor vehicles when they come in to purchase their registration or when they purchase the vehicle and they come to transfer a title on it. So that is the main function of the window teller. At special times of the year when it was getting close to an election we seemed to handle quite a few voter registration applications at that point in time. The process has changed now to where that's mainly handled through the Secretary of State. But at that point in time, we did do voter registrations. Then of course at the end of each year, in the beginning of the next year, we would also have quite a few property tax payments coming in and once I learned Auto, then they put me over

to assisting property tax customers as well. So it was a variety of responsibilities, but the main focus for the window teller is to register the vehicles in Harris County annually as well as transfer the motor vehicle titles from one owner to the other.

DE LEON: You mentioned that you became a permanent employee of the county. When was that?

MCLEMORE: About of May 1981.

DE LEON: And was that being a window clerk as well?

MCLEMORE: Yes, that was still a window clerk. And so I continued as window teller or window clerk at the Pasadena Annex until about September of 1986 I believe it was. I was called by Mr. Smith's [Carl Smith, Assessor and Collector of Taxes, Harris County, 1948 – 1998] people and asked if I would go to what was then known as the Uvalde Branch and help fill in there as a cashier. Now I had done some relief work as a cashier and had learned the cashier process while at the Pasadena office because if we weren't busy, I'm not one to sit idle. So I was always trying to find something else to do. And so in that process when someone would not be there they had trained me to cashier -- I had been a relief cashier in Pasadena. So when this opening became available at the Uvalde office they called and asked me if I would go to Uvalde and work as a cashier and assist the manager because they also did not have an assistant manager. They were at that time building the new county annex in that vicinity of the county which was in the northeast area. They opened up, I believe it was like the end of October 1986, that's when we moved from the Uvalde office to what they called the Wallisville

office. It's now known as the Jim Fonteno Branch over in the North Channel area.

I was probably there a total of about six months when I was offered the position as the assistant manager at the Wallisville - Jim Fonteno office. I stayed there as assistant manager until the end of December 1992 when Mr. Smith called – Carl Smith – called and asked me if I was still interested in the position as manager at the Pasadena office. The manager there was retiring at the end of January 1993.

DE LEON: Who was that?

SARAH MCLEMORE: Lila Konstantine was her name. And she was retiring January 31, 1993, and I had expressed interest in the position to Mr. Smith about a month to six weeks before. He at that time had made his decisions but then, like I said, he called me right before Christmas of 1992 and asked me if I was still interested in it which I told him, "Yes." So he told me to report there the first day of January. And so I went over there and kind of got used to the office and the people and helped because Lila Konstantine, who was the manager of the office at that time, did not have an assistant manager and so I went over to kind of assist her and to go into a transition period until she retired at the end of that month. I believe she may have had some comp time and vacation time that she needed to take and so forth before her retirement went into effect. So I actually went into the Pasadena office the first working day of January 1993 and was manager at Pasadena I believe it was until April of 1999.

After Mr. Smith passed away in July 1998 then the Commissioners' Court

appointed Willie Alexander to be the interim County Tax Assessor-Collector until the next general election which was in November of 1998. And in that election, Paul Bettencourt was elected the County Tax Assessor-Collector. Because Willie Alexander was an appointed Tax Assessor-Collector, Paul Bettencourt took office right after the election in November of 1998. When he came into office, I was still manager at Pasadena but then it was that Spring I believe it was that he and Jim DeVore, who was the chief deputy and still is the chief deputy at Harris County Tax Office, asked if I would be interested in being a regional manager for the Auto Department, one of two, Debbie Duhon was the other regional manager. So I accepted that position and Debbie and I were over the fourteen branch offices – I believe it was thirteen branch offices not inclusive of downtown. And so we split the branches. I was over the north side offices and she was over the south side offices. I did that probably close to a year.

I can't remember the exact dates but I believe 2001 was when Mr. Bettencourt asked me if I would come downtown and manage his strategic planning program which was called "Top Down, Bottom Up," meaning that he wanted the ideas of the employees. He wanted their input, they did the work, and he wanted them to tell him what it is that needed to be done. His directors were basically the steering committee of this program so he wanted the ideas from the employees and then he wanted the ideas pushed up to the top.

DE LEON: So this is every employee in the Tax Office, right?

MCLEMORE: Yes, yes. So in other words, "Top Down" would mean that Mr.

Bettencourt, set his mission for the office and his goals. And then those

goals through the steering committee were pushed down to the employees as to what the goals were. Then the employees, all the way down to just your clerical employees, all the way down everybody was asked to sit, you know, to meet, have team leaders and teams and meet to determine what goals it was that they wanted to see happen in their department. And then those goals were pushed back up through their team leaders to the managers and on up to the directors and to Mr. Bettencourt to try to see what goals were feasible to be met and we've accomplished a lot of goals. A lot of them over the years. Some of them took a number of years to accomplish, but I would venture to say that we accomplished a very minimum of 80 percent of the goals that the employees had set. And like I said, it didn't happen overnight. But, then Rome wasn't built overnight either.

So, I did that position – it was eventually somewhat phased out about five years later, but while being the manager of the strategic planning program, Mr. Bettencourt also asked me at one point in time to work with the internal audit group which I did for about six months maybe. And then at the point in time he asked me if I would come back over into the Human Resource and Training Department which is where I had been with the “Top Down, Bottom Up” group. He asked me if I would come back over and actually head up and be the training manager for the window teller training for the Auto Department. I'd kind of gotten incorporated with training through the “Top Down, Bottom Up” because a lot of the goals that the employees were setting had to do with cross-training. And so I had gotten involved with training and cross-training through the goals that they had been setting and had actually done training when the

employees were asking for cross-training. I was organizing and doing that. So, through that, that's kind of how that got me involved in the training and development area of office.

DE LEON: What do you mean when you say "cross-training"? Is that training across different departments?

MCLEMORE: Yes, some of the people in the Auto Department, particularly, out at your branch offices, they wanted to learn more about property tax. Even within the Property Tax Department itself you have some people that are very specialized. Because Harris County is so large, in our Accounting Department you have one area that strictly refunds or you may have one that's just disbursements or one that's auto accounting and so that the office could function in the absence of someone else, then they were actually wanting to be cross-trained within their own departments. We'll say, in answering the phone, when customers would call in with property tax questions during a high peak time of phone calls, we needed more people to actually answer those phone calls and that's where a lot of our cross-training came into play.

So, voter registration also had some areas in which they wanted cross-training. Because as I said, that with Harris County being as large as it is, you have areas that do specialized work and so to keep the departments functioning, then they were wanting to learn how to do the other duties within their department. So should someone be absent, then they could fill in and the then department would run smoothly.

DE LEON: Now, I want to back-track just a little bit to keep track of your Tax Office

jobs. You mentioned you worked as a cashier for a while. Could you briefly describe the responsibilities of a cashier? And then after that, of manager and regional manager.

MCLEMORE: OK, as a cashier, which we no longer have, the job was strictly cashier.

The Auto Department has taken over a different system. When I came to work at the Harris County Tax Office, it was a complete – I guess you would say manual system. It was not computerized. We'll just backtrack even to the window teller position. At that point in time we worked with the typewriter. And we had multi-copied forms. We had many forms that we filled out if the person wanted to come in and transfer a car title. To transfer ownership, we would type a Form 31, which was a multi-copied form that had the owner's name, the purchase price of the vehicle, the sales tax that was due on it and that type thing. Then if it had to do with the registration there was another form that we had to type up. If it was currently registered, we typed the Form 17. If it was not registered we typed the Form 39 just to register it, if it was not registered and they needed plates we typed the Form 39P to issue plates on it. If it was currently registered but missing plates, we would type the Form 16 in addition to all of these, which was the replacement form. Also, if they were required to bring in a copy of their registration and didn't bring in their registration, we had to look it up on the old teletype system that went into Austin. Then we'd have to type that information in there to retrieve the information and then we would actually type that information on what we called a duplicate receipt, which was called Form 26. So each one of

these forms was a different color. You know, Form 17 was yellow, anyway, it looked like a rainbow when you got through with all these different forms.

So, like I said, it was a manual system, and no Window Teller/Clerk actually cashiered their own work. When they would finish typing it up, they would ask the customer for the money and then each office had a central cashier. So I believe the Pasadena office always had at least two cashiers, sometimes three cashiers and so all of the eleven window tellers then would come to the central cashier to have their receipts receipted and the money collected and the change given. So, as a cashier, that's what the cashier's position would do is they would cashier the window teller's receipts and make change, of course they would have to balance out at the end of the day.

DE LEON: Were there ever any problems with that type of system? With each one taking the money to the central cashier?

MC LEMORE: Well, the one thing it did – be it good or be it bad – the window tellers didn't have the responsibility to meet shortfalls because that fell over onto the cashier. Sometimes the cashiers didn't balance and sometimes if we can actually track it down to an error that the window teller actually helped us make, then we would split the shortage, because we had to make up our own shortages. I don't care if it's a penny or if it's a hundred dollars, we had to make up our own shortages. So, there wasn't a lot of trouble, that was what we had always known at that point in time, so that's just the way it was done.

Now, I believe it was in 1994 – not quite sure on that year – but Harris County transitioned over to the new registration title system what we call the RTS

computer system, that is actually owned by, at that time it was called Texas Department of Transportation, that now has gone through a name change and it's the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles. Those systems are distributed throughout the state and maintained by the state. The Harris County Tax Office actually works as an agent and there is a partnership between Harris County Tax Office and the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles. We do the work and collect the money for the transferring of the titles and registration for the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, but Texas Department of Motor Vehicles actually issues the titles and maintains the computer system. So, at any rate, in 1994, we went over to the new RTS system. RTS system was designed for each window deputy to actually collect their own money, but at that point in time, Mr. Smith was not ready to do that, so we made whatever changes necessary to our system so we could continue on with the central cashier.

After Mr. Bettencourt came, then he saw more of a need to start moving over to each window teller being responsible for their own money and cashier. They each become more of a teller rather than just a deputy doing work and start collecting their own money. And that phased out the central cashiering position. So we did that first by making the window tellers – well we changed their name, that's where the name transition from window clerk, window deputy, to window teller because they actually starting handling checks and cash. And we started out by them just accepting checks, but still going to a central cashier for cash transactions. And then, later, probably several years later, we transitioned to taking checks. Then we actually started having each window teller accept money

at the window. So, they then became tellers as well and that phased out the central cashier. Each office does still have what we call a Property Tax PC [personal computer], or a PC that has a cashiering program in it in a centralized location. So if there is for some reason, which is very seldom anymore, a transaction that cannot be worked in the RTS computer system, the money taken at the window that is actually worked manually and that work is actually cashiered in this separate cashier program. And then receipts are given to the window teller to help them balance out in daytime. Also, that PC with the cashier program in it has a program not only for Auto but one for Property Tax. So, it's a very diversified job, particularly out at the branches. Our branches are actually bigger than some of the whole county tax offices for some of your smaller branches across Texas.

In 2003, Mr. Bettencourt and our Harris County Tax Office hosted the Tax Assessor-Collectors' Association Conference here and we had the Tax Assessor-Collectors come to the Harris County Tax Office and do a tour around the office...

DE LEON: Are these tax assessors from other Texas counties?

MC LEMORE: Yes, there are 254 counties in Texas and those Tax Assessor-Collectors came to Houston and the conference was from Sunday through Thursday, I believe, and one of the events we did was we brought them to the Harris County Tax Office and had them do a tour. They were just amazed at the size of our office and the way our office functioned. They said that some of our branches were twice as big as their offices, in employees and what we did as with

their whole tax office operation all together because they were such a small county.

So, I always said when I was out at the branches that some of the employees would say, “Well, I wish I could work downtown.” And I said, “You are learning more at a branch than you would working downtown because downtown, you’re in specialized area. Whereas at a branch office, you’re learning some of all of it.” Now as far of getting deep into research, no. They don’t do that at a branch office because those records and all are downtown. But at a branch, the work is very diversified because you do some of all of it.

DE LEON: Now, could you now describe what some of your responsibilities were when Mr. Carl Smith asked you to be a manager?

MCLEMORE: Well, first off I went from cashier to the assistant manager. As the assistant manager, then I basically just did the same thing as the manager did. We shared duties, you know, such as balancing the work in the morning, being sure that the cashiers had ended the day balanced, that they had the opening cash they needed each morning.

DE LEON: Who was the manager?

SARAH MCLEMORE: The manager at the Uvalde office at that time was Tressia Nichols. So, we shared duties in fact shared duties so closely that sometimes they really didn’t know who was the manager – whether it was Tressia or whether it was myself just because we did the same thing. We both handled customers and assisted not only our window deputies but you know, dealt with working with the customers themselves and problem-solving and that type of thing. So when Mr.

Smith asked me to become manager and go to the Pasadena office, there again – it was a transition period because the office at that point in time he had actually eluded to the fact that he had made the decision for someone else to be the manager there and then he changed his mind. So, as a result, there were some hurt feelings and so forth when I went over there. Fortunately, because I had worked there before I already knew these people and we got through the transition fairly well. So, there was myself as the manager, then I had an assistant manager, who was JoAnn Jones, and then there were two cashiers at that time: one was Patsy Tipton and the other one was Ann Green.

Tape 1 Side B

DE LEON: This is Side B of Tape 1 of an interview with Sarah McLemore.

MCLEMORE: So, as the manager at Pasadena then I was just coordinating the activities or the work for the day. Actually part of my job was balancing each one of the cashier's work as I remember that's kind of how my job started. Of course, I'd come in and open the vault so everybody could get their supplies out of the vault such as their sticker books and so forth to sell stickers. I'd get the change order ready to be sure that all of the cashiers had the operating change that they needed as well as balancing the work. And then after that work was balanced, then my job everyday was to go downtown to bring in the work as well as to bring in the money that the cashiers needed me to buy change for. If I had to pick up license plates and even if it was not a large shipment of license plates and forms, then I would bring those back.

DE LEON: So did you have to drive every day to downtown?

MCLEMORE: Yes, I'd drive downtown every day.

DE LEON: What was that like?

MCLEMORE: Well, it wasn't bad other than the fact that we parked down in the basement and if it was full then we just had to keep driving around the block until we found a space open.

Of course you know I had to be sure that we had all the forms in place because remember that was before computers so we didn't have the ability to download a form and print it. They had a print shop, we printed the forms, and I would take those back to the office and so forth.

Of course we had management meetings that the managers had to attend approximately once a month. Then part of the responsibility was interacting with the customers from the standpoint of problem-solving; if they had any issues or whatever, or if the window clerk needed assistance, then it would be my place to go out and diffuse or to take care of any issues that they might have.

DE LEON: So this was still as assistant manager?

MCLEMORE: Well, it was as assistant manager when I was at Wallisville and then the position as manager when I went to Pasadena. I want to say the Pasadena office because it had been there in that particular location since 1980. There was a lot of stuff going on when I went over there and I had to "bitch" because there were just old forms we used to like when I first used to work there. We had the old teletype machine, though we no longer have the teletype machine and haven't had it for years, there were still rolls of ticker tape that were in the store room.

Stuff that we didn't use, hadn't used for a hundred years. So, I threw out stuff like that but one of the things I did retain, and I'll show you, was we had old title manuals there and registration manuals and bulletins that went all the way back into the 1950's. At first, they were throwing them away and I let one or two get away from me, but I was digging out of the trash. The joke was at that office – because I was cleaning out – this was during that month – from January first until the end of January before Ms. Konstantine retired was kind of when I was going through stuff and the joke was, "Don't stand still or Sarah's gonna throw you in the trash can!"

But anyway, I do have some old title manuals and bulletins that I've kept and actually even referred to them as late as two weeks ago looking up something that I felt was in conflict with the way Texas DMV had it in their title reg manual at this time. So, I'll show those to you.

So, anyway. So when I went over there, it was just kind of the cleaning out process and organizing – and organizing bulletins from Texas Department of Transportation and so forth. Like I said, this was before the days of the computer when they didn't have the manual on the computer where they could just send your little updates on the computer so we would get registration and title bulletins, what we called RTBs, we would get those regularly.

DE LEON: What does RTB stand for?

MCLEMORE: RTB stands for Registration Title Bulletins. So, I have all those. I have notebooks of those from the time I came down here from 2001. I've got

notebooks of those in my workroom right now. Of course, the ones when I left out at Pasadena stayed out at Pasadena, but I've got notebooks of these. But anyway, that's kind of an overview of what the job consisted of. I had to look at inventory and like I said, if we didn't have them I had to order license plates and so forth to keep our inventory of license plates and stickers. And then another thing we had to do then because we had the sticker books. We didn't have the what we call "point of sale" sticker where we have the paper in the printer and it just prints with receipt in the sticker and all now. But back then, you had sticker books and each book had fifty little stickers in it and so you had to order those. And then before we sent them back downtown one of the things that I did was to go through them to be sure that each book was completed properly, that the stickers had been used and each square was filled out properly. Then we put those in order and put them back in the box that they belonged in and then brought those downtown to the warehouse when I would make my trip back downtown. So, we'd bring the completed inventory or supplies back downtown.

So, those days have changed, because like I said, we don't have the boxes with the sticker books anymore, because that was one of the goals through the "Top Down, Bottom Up" was to be able to print the sticker and the receipt all in one. I believe if I'm not mistaken George Hammerlein was advantageous in that goal. He does still work in the Harris County Tax Office at this time. But that was one of the things that he had initiated and brought up, if I'm not mistaken, was that what we call the "point of sale" sticker. TxDOT [Texas Department of Transportation] thought that was a pretty good idea and they did their

investigations and process and what they had to do to get it to happen and that happened pretty quickly. And so we've had the "point of sale" sticker I would say at least since 2005 when we started printing the sticker and receipt all in one instead of having the sticker books.

It was around 2001-2002 when I was working with the "Top Down, Bottom Up," I know that I submitted at least seventeen goals that were RTS, the registration title system oriented goals. And I believe when I sent those in to Texas Department of Transportation, they accepted about 50% of those goals right off the bat. Now, there were some of them that they said, "No," they didn't seem feasible at that time. They have come about since then. And one of those was the Disabled database. And this just came about within the last year, and that is to do with your disabled placards, meaning that they're being tracked in the registration title system now in the RTS system rather than Harris County Tax Office having to have our own database to track it. And they had told me before, no it couldn't be done because there were too many people with similar names. My thought was, why does it have to be tracked my name? Why can't it be tracked by the placard number just like license plates are? So eventually, that's the way it was done, and like I said that goal was submitted probably in the end of 2001 or in 2002 and came to fruition within say twelve to eighteen months ago. So, like I said earlier, things don't happen overnight, but they come about.

So, as regional manager, what I did because I had a base office, first my base office was at the Mickey Leland office. Later, they changed it back to the lobby of the Pasadena office, put up a cubicle in the lobby. That was where my

office was. I would go out and visit with the different branches to see what issues they had. To meet with the managers and go over issues within the office and then just to get to know the employees as well as the management team to let them know they're not out there on a ship all by themselves. That we are here to help them. Then also, if they had questions regarding either auto or property tax or voter registrations, then they would call me and hopefully, I was able to answer their questions, if not, then I would get the answer for them and call them back to give them their answers. So that was part of the job as the regional manager. So we travelled from branch to branch. We were usually in a different branch every day. Very seldom were we just at our base location.

DE LEON: So you were regional manager until when?

MCLEMORE: I was the regional manager – let's see, I'm trying to think – it seems like it was about the spring – for about a year, I think it was. I think it was about a year from Spring of 1999, no maybe it was longer than that. I really need to go back and look at that. I can't remember whether it was a year or two years. I'll have to look at those dates, I'm not sure.

DE LEON: Did these positions change every time Carl Smith was about to run again for Tax Assessor?

MCLEMORE: Actually, under Carl Smith we didn't have that position. We had your manager, your assistant manager, and then your cashiers and your window tellers. So those were your basic positions that you had at the branch office. It wasn't until I believe during the time that Willie Alexander actually came in after Mr. Smith passed away that the first person that was a Regional Manager – I'm trying

to think of what her name – shoot! – Barbie Hoffart? – I'd have to look and see what Barbara's name was. But anyway, under Willie Alexander, she more or less became a regional manager and then, after Paul Bettencourt came in, Barbara resigned, for personal reasons. And so it was at that point that Jim DeVore had talked with Debbie Duhon about being a regional manager, and he had asked her who she would recommend or think about for a second regional manager, and that's when they called me and asked me if I would be interested in being a regional manager. So that was actually under Paul Bettencourt.

Now under Paul Bettencourt, the structure of the branch offices changed somewhat, whereas they went to the system of a manager, a supervisor, and what they call a lead clerk. So the offices then instead of having a two-tier management they had a three-tier management. And then for a time, they still had the cashier until we finally went to the window teller program but they had the manager, the supervisor, and lead clerk and then you had your cashier and then your window tellers. Some of your larger offices, such as your Bellaire office and your Mickey Leland office, they actually had a four-tier team as well as the downtown office being your manager, assistant manager, supervisor, and lead clerk. So, those were some of the changes in transition between Mr. Smith and Paul Bettencourt.

DE LEON: Could you describe Carl Smith?

MCLEMORE: Well, of course, Carl Smith, when he passed away in office, I believe he was either 87 or 89 – to me he was almost like a father figure because he was about the age that my father would have been. But, he was a very stoic man, to

me. He had a funny side to him, but he was also very serious. He was serious about what he did. He wasn't afraid of anybody. If somebody didn't like what he did, he was like, "Oh well! I'm the County Tax Assessor-Collector. I'm the boss here!" And in fact, one time – there was only really one encounter when I – well one of the things that he told me a number of years ago and I think this is when I was out at the Wallisville Office and he was up on the second floor of Auto one day when I walked in. Like I said, we had to come in everyday with our work at that point in time. And he said, "Well, how's it going?" He was always very accessible to his employees. You saw him all over the office, particularly downtown, and his door was always open. You could always walk in his office and talk to him.

But he was up on Auto Second Floor and he said, "We'll how's it going?" or something to that effect.

And I said, "Well, everything would be fine if I'd get this problem situated."

And he said, "Well, tell me what your problem is." And then he said, "I wanna tell you something and don't ever forget it." He said, "I can't fix a problem, if I don't know about it." He said, "So if you ever have a problem, there is nothing" – and he used the word "nothing" – "there is nothing in this tax office that cannot be fixed. But I have to know about it before it can be fixed."

So that is something that I have lived by ever since then and that I have even used with the employees as I've trained them. Mr. Bettencourt used the term "I don't like bad surprises," which in essence is saying the same thing. "I

have to know about it so I can fix it. Come tell me about it so I can fix it. Don't let me find out about it and let it be a bad surprise."

But anyway, I don't remember what the situation was, but we sat down and talked about it and got it resolved. There was only one other time and it had to do with the vault and safe. He had decided that he wanted – though at the Pasadena office, it used to be the Pasadena Savings and Loan Building, so it had a big, huge, steel vault in it. But he decided that he wanted a safe put inside of this vault for our money bank bags to be put in at night, not just locked up in this big vault. So, anyway, when the company brought this little safe out to me, they told me there was two ways to lock this safe. We could either use it by combination or I could use the key; or I could use the key *and* the combination. Well, it was inside this steel, secured vault and so I just always used the key and only me and one other person knew where the key went at night.

Something about the combination I felt funny about from the very get-to. And they said, as long as the combination – you know, the dial – stays right here, all you have to do is just use the key. Don't move the dial. Well, that was all fine and dandy and one day one of my employees came up for a moment and she had her little 2-year-old with her and the 2-year-old went into the vault and turned the dial on the safe.

Well, Brinks had not come to pick up the deposit yet, so the deposit was still in the safe. So, I got my combination out and could not get it to work. Could not get it to work. And so, I called all the people I was supposed to – had been told to call and so forth. Couldn't get it open. So, this was like one afternoon. So

the next morning I was downtown – and you know, like I said, Mr. Smith’s door was always open – walked by his door and he said, “How’s it going this morning?” I thought he had been told about the safe.

I said, “Well, it’s be just fine if I could get the safe open.”

He turned around and looked at me and says, “What do you mean ‘get the safe open’!” And so, I explained it to him and said, “How come I don’t know about it?”

And I said, “Well, I told the people in command – you know, the chain of command – that I was supposed to tell.”

And he looked at me and he said, “Who’s name is on the door? Who is your boss?”

I said, “You, sir. Carl Smith.”

He said then, “*I’m* the one that you need to tell.”

we had already been told that the safe company couldn’t be out there to do it for whatever time period it was. It seemed like it was two or three days. I don’t know what strings Mr. Smith pulled, but the safe was open within about an hour. So, that was the only confrontation of seriousness like that that Mr. Smith and I ever ran up against. But here again, it goes back to the thing that *he* could fix the problem but he had to know about it. And whoever I told had not told him. So, once he knew about it, then it was fixed.

So, he took his job seriously. And I enjoyed working for him. Like I said, I worked for him from 1979 until he passed away in 1998. And Willie Alexander, I didn’t know him that well. What I did know of him, for the short time, enjoyed

working for him. He was very pleasant. But like I said, I didn't work for him that long.

A lot of changes came when Mr. Bettencourt came in. With Mr. Smith, being that he was of the generation that he was from, he was not a computer person. He really didn't care if we had computers and PCs in the office or not. We were the last county in the State of Texas to even be put onto the RTS system because he liked it just the way it worked without the RTS system – without the computer. So, I think there was only one or two actual PCs in the office when Mr. Smith died. We all still had typewriters, except the window tellers. So, when Mr. Bettencourt came in, that's one of the first things that changed. The typewriters went away and PCs came in.

And so it was a very big learning curve for a lot of us. Though I had a PC at home, I didn't know that much about it. And so, in 1999 was when I really started learning the PC because I never had one on my desk before. So that's when I really started learning Word and Excel and started going to some of the training classes through the County, which we also, at least out in the branches, we didn't know they were even there for us to take advantage of. We didn't know HRRM [Human Resources and Risk Management] had these training classes for us to take advantage. So, when Mr. Bettencourt came in there were a lot of changes with the technology. There was a lot changes with training. Because when Mr. Smith was here, we basically learned from each other. That's how we learned our skills within the office. We taught each other. Whereas, with Mr. Bettencourt, he hired Vicki Brown-Sobecki as our first Director of Training, so

that's really where our training department started getting put together and so forth and then, like I said, under "Top Down, Bottom Up," the strategic planning program, I was under Vicki. So here again, that's kind of how the training part evolved.

DE LEON: Would you describe some of your current responsibilities as Manager of Training?

MCLEMORE: As training manager, not only do I coordinate and have training classes for the window tellers and with the new employees, that's what it was geared up to was when we were hiring new employees to train them and it's a three-week course – train them to put them on the window to actually work. Then like I said, we've had some of the specialized training, like, say, the November election. Well, we want to be sure that all of our people that answer phones during the general election because we may have 150 at least a minimum of 150 people ready to answer phone calls if they come in on election day, as well as prior to the election, and be sure that people know the right answers that they're supposed to say. Then we have training for our phone agents. So that's something else that I work with. Also, I do training for property tax phone agents. Our Property Tax Support Group that goes out to the branches at the end of the year and at property tax deadlines like December 31, January 31, June 30 -- those are property tax deadlines, so I coordinate and train the employees to be equipped to go out and handle property tax. Now, these are not people that do this every day, these are people that have other jobs that go out and just help on these special peak times. Like myself, for instance. I don't work in property tax or customer service, but

during the peak time for property tax, I would go out to the branches for two to three days to work with the customers to collect property tax. So that I'm up to date on the processes, then we have a refresher course, for everyone that's gonna be support during those peak times. So we do that.

Another responsibility that I do, there is a certification process for our property tax people – really anybody in the Tax Office – but it's geared mainly towards collections and customer service people that talk with people on the phone. And as property tax professionals, we used to be under the Board of Property Tax Examiners under the umbrella of that group. That has been dissolved by the Legislature this last year and last September 1 [2009] I believe it was when the licensing of our property tax professionals was put under Texas Department of Licensing and Regulations, TDLR. So that's been kind of a different process.

But anyway, depending on whether you're trying to get certification as a Registered Tax Assessor or whether you're trying to get a certification as a Registered Tax Collector, RTA or RTC, there are different courses that you have to take. For the RTA there's a five-year certification process, the RTC there's a three-year certification process. And part of my job is to coordinate these trainings. I don't teach them. I have taken some of the classes, but I don't teach them, but that is to coordinate our employees who are going through this certification to coordinate their trainings. And of course to do the PO's and all of that stuff. Some of the trainings, we have here. So if we have trainers that come here and train then part of my responsibilities then is to work with the trainers to

see that they have those supplies, the equipment, the training materials and so forth and I see that that's distributed out to the people that will be attending the courses and so forth and tracking their training. And then once, they're certified an RTA has to earn 75 CEs in a five-year period the RTC has 25 CEs they have to earn in five years.

DE LEON: CEs, again, are what?

MCLEMORE: Continuing Education. So, then, I'm tracking this, and I get where these courses are going to be made available and then try to get our people lined up to go to these courses and so forth so they can have and get their certification, as well as their re-certification done. That consumes more time than people realize it does – tracking that. So that's one of the things that I do. And then like if there's conferences and seminars that our employees are going to be going to to earn CEs that's job related. Maybe they're CEs, like I said, for their certification but all these conferences that I go to are absolutely job-related. And that's another thing that I do is find out when these seminars and conferences are gonna be and determine who needs to go either by their job or by the CEs if they may need towards their certification.

The other thing that I've been doing here lately because of the hiring freeze – and we haven't been able to hire new employees, I've been doing a lot of – if you want to call it “re-training.” Just working one-on-one. One of the things I started this year was compiling some material on heavy trucks and trailers, which is a very...there's a lot to it. And so I put this material together and then I was working with the call center with Property and Auto, Second Floor Auto,

having like three people come down at a time and we'd go through truck and trailer training and buses.

DE LEON: Are there different processes for titling bigger trucks?

MCLEMORE: The registration more so than titling. It's more complex. And of course, our call center is having to answer questions as the customers call and ask and they want to be able to give the customers on the telephone the best answers they can so that when they come into the office, be it downtown or one of the branches, that they have what they need. And so, I was working with the call center employees and doing this training on trucks and trailers and buses. Stuff that's not just an everyday deal but yet, they probably get those calls quite often. So, I've worked with them and then we've had some that need some, just little specialized tender loving care training and so that's what I'm doing today is actually working with one that does title transfers for dealers and she's out at our distribution center. That's where this group works. And they're some little problems that she seems to be having so that's what the rest of my day will be devoted to her to try to help her get over some humps that she's got.

Being though that we're not hiring, my training hasn't stopped, it's just gone a different direction. If out at the branches if they have someone that's struggling just all of a sudden – maybe they're having more than normal voided transactions or such as this, maybe they're making more mistakes or something, well, then it's like OK, let's bring them in let's look at it. Let's see what the issues are to get them back out there because, obviously, we can't hire anybody. But we don't want to lose anybody either – we can't hire anybody. So we're just

looking at issues and problems that our existing employees have and see where we can get on that and try to fix whatever problems there might be.

Tape 2 Side A

DE LEON: So, we've heard a lot about your different positions at the Tax Office and I want to backtrack to before that. I meant to ask you earlier, but I moved a little bit too quickly. What was it like growing up in Alice, Texas? I know that it's west of Corpus Christi.

MCLEMORE: Yes, it is west of Corpus Christi. Alice, Texas. Okay. Well, of course being that that's the only place I lived when I growing up it seemed like an alright place to grow up. I enjoy Alice – growing up in Alice. Mother and Daddy were both teachers; my dad was the principal at the elementary school. Well, he was principal long before that at another school but when I was in elementary school, he was the principal at my school. My mother was a teacher – Fifth Grade teacher –at another elementary school. Of course, I don't know what the kids thought about what I could do, but since I was the principal's daughter for whatever reason they were afraid of me. But, it was okay growing up in Alice. I had a good time. I wasn't a perfect angel by any means. We didn't have all the entertainment around that the children or kids today have in the Houston Metropolitan Area so you kind of had to make your own fun. We didn't have video games then, so we played outside.

In fact, when I was growing up, though, it seems like I remember about 1956 when some friends of ours got a color TV and oh, that was a big thing, you know. We went over to their house to look at color TV. We didn't actually have a TV in our home I don't think until either 1957 – I was around eight to ten years old when we actually got a TV in our home. I would go across the street and watch the TV at my friends house.

But like I said, then, you played. You made your own entertainment. As a teenager – of course then you could get your driver's license at 14. Though I wasn't turned loose in a car at that point in time but I did get to drive with my mother and daddy in the car with me. Of course, at school – like I said, we didn't have all the outside activities that we have here. But when you were a teenager, we had a little girls' group called Cotillion. I don't even know if they still have Cotillion.

DE LEON: Right. I've heard of it.

MCLEMORE: And so that was one of the things I was a member of – the Debutante thing. Then in high school, you know you had your little high school dances and stuff like that that you went to. I never did get involved with the band, I was in the choir in Junior High School. I do love to sing, that's one of the things I thoroughly enjoy it. It's a passion of mine is singing – as well as playing the piano. I did take piano for like eight years at home and then after that I've self-taught myself and I thoroughly enjoy. And then of course, one of the things that we did at night, of course you went to the movies – when you were dating, you'd go to the movies and then you cruised around town, you know. We'd cruise

around town and then you'd have a place where everybody congregated and met and visited and what have you and of course, I had an eleven o'clock curfew so I can't say that I was 100 percent in meeting it at eleven o'clock – this was on the weekends. Of course, I'd get in trouble when I didn't meet it at eleven o'clock. My mother was pretty strict where that was concerned. But anyway, I really don't know what – I was a member of First Baptist Church so I was involved in a number of the youth activities and so forth at the church.

DE LEON: In elementary school, it was the early fifties, were schools segregated then?

MCLEMORE: Yes. Well, in Alice – Alice was, at that point in time, it was probably I would say at least 50 percent Anglo and 50 percent Hispanic. Then there were very few blacks. I bet we didn't have two families – or maybe three. In High School – I don't remember any girls – I think there was one boy who was black. Very nice people I remember; I guess there was more than maybe three families. The way the town was set up at the time, the elementary school that I went to was mainly Anglos – there were a few Hispanics depending on what farm they lived on or what area they lived in. They were at our school – most of the Hispanics went to – I hate to use the term – *tracks*, but there was a railroad track that ran right through the center of town. And when my mother and daddy moved there, they actually were teaching at the school and lived in the area of what – when I was growing up was concerned – the Hispanics' side of the tracks – and taught at both schools. And then the town seemed to move North. So it seemed like the majority of the Hispanic families lived on the South side of town and most of the Anglos lived on, if you want to call it that, whatever you want to call it – lived on

the North side of town. And like, I said there were farms around so we did have Hispanics that attended our school, but the majority of Hispanics were on the other side of the railroad tracks. Now, the Black families – the Afro-American or Black families – they also lived on the South side. And every summer our church, First Baptist Church, in Alice would do a Vacation Bible School with the True Light Baptist Church, which was the Black Church, and that was one of the highlights of my summer every year was to go to Bible school at True Light Baptist Church, that was a blast and half!

I always remember being that – my school, of what I can remember of school – I remember it being segregated as far as the Blacks. Now several years ago – I don't remember when – I loved going around town because like I said that on the South side of town is where my mother and daddy lived when they first moved to Alice back in the 30s and so I liked going over there just to – trying to put my history together.

DE LEON: Go over to the South side?

MCLEMORE: To the South side. And we also travelled that direction because there's this restaurant we like to eat out over there. And so we were roaming around over there and mother was telling me this is where she lived when she first moved to Alice and this other a few blocks away is where my daddy had lived and so forth and so in driving around there, I said, "Look, Mother!" And there was kind of a vacant lot, but there were the steps there. And it was the Alice Colored School. So, there was a time that they were segregated based on that plaque that was on this step. But the building was long gone. So, when I was growing up, yes, the

schools were segregated, but at some point in time they were not, long before that. But yes, when I was growing up, they were segregated. And I never knew anything else about segregation because we didn't have hardly any blacks living down there.

When I would come to Baytown to visit my cousin in the mid-fifties, that's kind of when integration and segregation – when I said that they were segregated, they were not segregated, they were integrated when I was going to school I'm sorry, they were *not* segregated, I said that backwards. So no, they were integrated, not segregated. And then when I would come up here, then this is when I would hear about it. I didn't even know about segregation when I was growing up because the blacks went to school with the us what few there were.

DE LEON: But you said it was a bigger deal in Baytown?

MCLEMORE: Yes. Yes, because there were more Blacks up here it was a big deal up here. And when I would come up here and I'd be hearing – because my aunt and uncle were teachers up here – and so they'd be talking about, with my parents, the segregation and the integration coming in and the problem they were having with integration. And I didn't really even know what in the world they were talking about because we didn't have that issue down south. Everybody went to school together. It just depended on where you lived. There wasn't any segregation where I was raised during the time that I was there. But that was kind of something new when I came up here. Of course, by the time I moved here in '65 of course integration had already been in effect.

DE LEON: How did you end up moving to Houston?

MCLEMORE: How did I end up moving to Houston? Well, after I had gotten married and my husband actually, was going to college and then he was working for...

DE LEON: Where was he going to college?

MCLEMORE: He was going to what was then called Texas A&I. It's now A&M at Kingsville.

DE LEON: And what's your husband's name?

MCLEMORE: William. Anyway, in the summertime, he was working for Humble Pipeline, which is where his daddy worked. His daddy worked for Humble Pipeline and his mother was a nurse for a doctor. When he finished that summer, he was hoping to be put on fulltime with Exxon, well, Humble, which is now Exxon. But it didn't happen. And so it was kind of during kind of the mid-sixties when the Oil Boom had done boomed out, okay? It had hit bottom. So, he went to Corpus and looked for jobs in Corpus but couldn't really find anything so his cousins that are more like aunts and uncles, they lived in the Pasadena and Baytown area and they were car salesmen, but anyway. So he came up and stayed with them and put applications in at the chemical plants and so he got a job at Rohm Haas, a chemical plant on 225.

And so we moved up to Pasadena and actually stayed with his cousins for about six weeks until we got our first paycheck and then we moved in an apartment. So, we just kind of stayed there and then we lived in an apartment for about six months and then we moved into a rent house for about ten months and then we bought our first home when I was nineteen years old and we lived in that house for forty years from April 1967 until May 1, 2008. And we have bought an

acre and a half – actually it's a Baytown address – it's actually in Harris County rather than the city limits. It's right at 2100 and I-10, the old Lynchburg area. There's a lot of history out there about the Texas Independence. It's in the old Lynchburg area, we bought an acre and a half and built a new home out there, but it's actually in Baytown. So, I've only lived out there two years. We lived in our other house for 40 years. That's where both of our children – well, Craig, our oldest son was actually born in Alice. He's 45, or will be 45 August 14. And then Stacy is our second son. He's 41, he'll be 42 in November. But he was born in Baytown. So they were raised here and went to school in Pasadena in South Houston.

DE LEON: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add or have I forgotten to ask you anything?

MCLEMORE: No, I can't think of anything right now.

DE LEON: Well, I think that's it. Thank you very much. I really appreciate the time.

This has been great!

MCLEMORE: Thank you. I hope I didn't just jabber on.

DE LEON: No, it has been great!